THE INDIAN ELECTRICITY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1986

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF POWER (SHRIMATI SUSHILA ROHATGI) : Sir, with your permission I move that the Bill further to amend the Indian Electricity Act, 1910, be taken into consideration.

Sir, hon. Members will share with me the view that during the last decade, especially during the last 3 or 4 years, there has been a significant improvement and progress in the generation of power and additional capacity. As a matter of fact last year we had a target of generating 170 billion units and we were able to complete that and exceed it to a certain extent. That means an improvement of about 8.5 per cent over last year. Now this year also the target is about 190 billion units which will compare to about 12% improvement over last year. In spite of that there is greater demand and the entire supply is not able to meet it. The supply is short and there is greater demand and there is puacity of power in certain States. But at the same time we have been trying to go in depth as to what are the reasons, how do we try to rectify it, how do we come to a batter solution. We have been trying to focus on two things —better utilisation of the present capacity that we have and one of the main factors—i.e. theft or pilferage. Our Minister referred to it last time in the last Session and he had said that he would try to bring a Bill. We had introduced a Bill in the last Session of Parliament which is being taken up for consideration today.

Apart from the theft factor, we have been trying to see how we can improve the plant-load factor. We have been able to identify 32 power plants also. A Renovation and Modernisation scheme is on, which will give additional capacity and which will be able to meet much more of our demand as it stands today. But I would like to say that in the pilferage thing there is something which is technical which could be slightly controlled if we had better capacitors, better equipment, more efficient transformers. But so far as the latter part is concerned, i.e. pilferage and theft, whether it be commercial or otherwise, there is tremendous amount that could be done in this and we could bring it down by something like 7 to 10 per cent with greater watch over the thefts committed. It is with this objective that this amendment is being brought forward today. Various steps have been taken initially. Vigilance squads have been instituted. They have made certain checks, they have conducted certain raids. We are also having the number of raids that have been conducted, the number of theft that have been found out there and we have taken action on that. At the same time a set of guidelines have also been issued how the State Electricity Boards could improve their performance and how they could improve the theft factor which not only erodes upon the revenues of the State Electricity Boards, which is a legitimate claim, but at the same time also makes it more difficult to come to perfect calculations about the consumption of elcetricity, its proper use and the difference in the demand and supply. Therefore, we want into it in detail and with this objective these amendments have been brought. We think by this we will be able to control and curb the theft factor. But we find that the present proviso lays down that according to section 39 it is an offence under the Indian Penal Code, but the Supreme Court set it aside saying that this was not an offence under the IPC, that theft or dishonest extraction of electricity did not fall under the IPC as an offence. Hence a self-contained para has been inserted and by this insertion it will be made a cognizable offence punishable with imprisonment and/or with fine as the situation demands. At the same time, abetment is also made punishable. In most of the cases we find that pilferage or theft of electricity is done by abetment or connivance of someone who knows about electricity.

So, that also will be a cognizable offence. At the same time, we also find that unauthorized reconnection or tampering with meters and things like that is also an offence and will be punishable. In addition to this, w e find that it will be very difficult for us to make this effcetive and, therefore, the State Electricity Boards have been authorized, under this amendment, and they will be in a position to take action and punish those who fall within this.

I think, with these three amendments coming here the theft factor can be curbed to a very great extent and I am sure all the Hon. Members of the House, irrespective of party affiliations, will welcome this measure because not only will it give more revenue to the State Electricity Boards but it will also result in improved performance and generation of greater power for the socio-economic betterment of the country, and, at the same time, put curbs on activities which are not warranted under law.

With these few words, Sir, I commend the Bill for the consideration of the House.

The question was proposed.

SHRI DIPEN GHOSH (West Bengal) : Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, apparently there is no dispute with this particular piece of legislation. In the Statement of Objects and Reasons and also in her very short speech, the honourable Minister of State for Energy has stated that with the enactment of this law the revenues of the State Electricity Boards will be augmented and, at the same time, proper utilization of electricity will be ensured. There, though I do not oppose this Bill—on the contrary I welcome it—I keep my fingers crossed when the Minister says that when this Bill becomes an Act it would help augment revenues of the State Electricity Boards and, at the same time, ensure proper utilization of energy. But, Sir, this theft or misuse, whatever you call it takes place thoroughout the country and not simply in certain urban areas alone. Even in the villages where the power lines run from one place to another through poles or towers, there is a method of stealing energy by, what is called, the hook system , as you know better than anybody else. (*Interruptions*) ... But the point is, if you are to discourage this theft or stealing of energy simply by enhancing the rate of penalty whether in the shape of money or in the shape of imprisonment, that connot, as such, ensure discouragement of the theft unless the people are made to associate themselves with the whole thing. And how to associate the people that is the question. There, to associate people, people's organisations, people's bodies like panchayats, municipalities and other bodies have to be associated. We have an experience in our State. Coordination committees have been formed at every village panchayat level with the participation of the panchayat people. Because the transmission towers are located in the villages and the cables run through the villages, naturally I would like that such an exercise is undertaken to associate people and people's organisations at various levels so that this type of theft or misuse of energy can be eliminated.

Secondly, Sir, even to encourage the people to take up this job, to associate themselves with this type of job, how can we encourgae them? If over the village energised wires are taken but actual electrification does not take place nor the services of that energised wire does not percolate down to the people, electric connections are not given due to various reasons like lack of metres, lack of this thing and that thing, naturally people do not feel very much encouraged to save the energy or to protect that energy because they do not use it. They are not given. They cannot avail of that energy. So, naturally, the second exercise should be taken that the energy

[Shri Dipen Ghosh]

which is generated can also the availed of by the people at various stages, various levels not only in the cities but in the villages also. We take that this rural electrification means that a village is electrified if an electrical pole is posted or rather stationed in that village and that energised wire has taken over that village one posted here and the other pole posted there. In order to associate the people with this exercise., this energy has to be placed for the use of the village people also, connections have to be given, and for that matter measures have to be taken.

My idea is—our hon. Minister has also stated—that the generation has gone up, but still it lags far behind. Whatever has been generated, that also is not, or cannot be, transmitted to all. There is also some deficiency. We know how the States suffer from this deficiency, even Haryana or Uttar Pradesh, some parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab.

SHRI KALPNATH RAI (Uttar Pradesh) : Bengal.

SHRI DIPEN GHOSH : Haryana's suffering is far worse than Bengal. So, you don't say all these things.

But the point is, an attempt has to be made to increase the generation because unless the generation can be increased it cannot be transmitted to all, everywhere where one needs electricity. So, more expenditure, more investment has to be made on the generation of power, on the generation and transmission of energy. If we go by the growth-rate of the economy, the growth-rate in electricity is much more important than that in various other sectors which are normally reckoned to prove that the economy is growing or the economy is developing.

So, my whole idea of taking part in this discussion emanates fromthis particular point. What clue I take from our Minister's speech is that it will ensure more revenue to the State Electricity Board, it will ensure better utilisation of the energy. And to ensure all this, you have to get the people associated and their organisations associated. In order to get the people and their organisations associated with this exercise, the electricity has to be placed at their disposal for their own use. And for that the electricity has to be generated more, has to be transmitted more and more investment has to be made for that. So, this is a part of the total exercise. This should be looked at in the background of the total exercise. There are various States which have already prepared certain projects for increasing their own generation. My State has also made such projects, but the Centre is still dragging its feet in sanctioning those projects. I do not know whether by this time the Centre has given its clearance to the Soviet or Japanese offer for the Bakreshwar Thermal plant in West Bengal. If it has not done yet, I hope the Centre would expedite the clearance. Similar is the question in regard to the Mejia Thermal Plant that has to be run by the DVC. The Centre is still dragging its feet to give clearance for the expansion of the Matiapur project of the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation. Only three four days ago there was a news item in the *Statesman* that a very important Member of Parliament elected for a Constituency of West Bengal belonging to the ruling party had written to the Energy Minister about the setting up of a nuclear power plant in Eastern India, particularly in West Bengal. The news item suggested that the Centre had informed that very important MP belonging to the ruling party that it had no objection to setting up that nuclear power plant in West Bengal. I do not know what is that. If that is correct, since both the Ministers are present in the House, why should we depend upon only the newspaper re-

ports, let us hear from the horse's mouth. So, let us know what exactly they are going to say on this particular point.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

India's non-participation in Commonwealth games

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Shri Eduardo Faleiro will make a statement.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO) : Sir, the Hon Members have no doubt been following recent development regarding the Commonwealth Games scheduled to start in Edinburgh from July 24.

The Government kept in close touch with the Governments of the Frontline States. The Prime Minister was personally in contact with leaders of some of the Frontline States in an effort to work out some formula whereby the Games could be salvaged. The Government's endeavour was to explore every possible avenue so that our athletes, could have the opportunity to compete in the Games. Unfortunately, some of the recent statements of the British Government have left no doubt in our mind that they are not immediately prepared to implement even the minimum measures which all the Commonwealth countries had agreed to at Nassau, in case there was no progress in the direction towards the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa.

Under the circumstances, the Government decided, with great regret, not to participate in the Games. Our decision is an expression of our solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa and with the Frontline States. It is still our hope that concerted action by the Commonwealth to implement necessary economic measures to end apartheid in South Africa will follow soon.

SHRI MOSTAFA BIN QUASEM (West Bengal) : It is good to see that at long last good sense has prevailed upon the Government of India and after protracted vacillation the Government of India has been able to come out of the vacillations and it has decided for India's withdrawal from the Commonwealth Games scheduled to held be from 24th July.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the decision to boycott should not be viewed merely and simply as a decision for non-participation in a particular Games. This decision of ours to boycott is to be interpreted and viewed as our strong protest against the British Government's continued support to the barbaric racist regime of South Africa. It is our protest against Mrs. Thatcher's reluctance to impose sanctions against the Pretoria regime; and it is a gesture of expressing our solidarity with the African States in their figlt against Apartheid in South Africa. Viewed from all these angles, the Government of India's decision is very much welcome. In spite of that what remains to be observed is that India did not take the lead in the boycott move. We just joined in the Games boycott. It was legitimately expected of India because of the unique position enjoyed by it within the Commonwealth and particularly as the leader of the NAM that India would take the leadership role in the boycott move. We should have taken the initiative. We could have made a unilateral declaration of the boycott and pulled our weight in persuading and mobilising other countries for the boycott move. But instead of doing, we just vacillated in the name of some decision by the African countries in the meeting of Harare on the 18th. of this month. This is the most unfortunate aspect of the